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SUBJECT: JORDAN: HONOR CRIMES 101

REF: A. AMMAN 1821
[1](#)B. AMMAN 1674
[1](#)C. AMMAN 1673
[1](#)D. AMMAN 1618
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Summary -----

[1](#)1. (SBU) This cable serves as an overview of honor crimes in Jordan, Post efforts to address the issue, and an analysis of the Jordanian establishment's response to the problem. More detailed reporting has been provided by post in reftels. End Summary.

Defining Honor Crimes -----

[1](#)2. (SBU) Activists and journalists characterize honor crimes as the murder of women committed by brothers, fathers, or other male family members who kill to "cleanse their family's honor." In recent months, "justifications" for murder have ranged from seeing the victim wearing makeup, being told the victim was talking to a man, or the victim's absence from home for several hours to allegations of infidelity or premarital sexual relations. In some instances, neighborhood rumors are enough to prompt the killings. There is little opportunity for the accused to refute slurs against her reputation.

2009 Statistics Comparable to Previous Years -----

[1](#)3. (SBU) There have been sixteen reported honor crimes in Jordan from January - August 2009. (Note: Activists feel that the number is likely higher as many honor crimes go unreported in rural areas or are reported as suicides or accidents. They acknowledge, however, that reporting has improved in recent years. End Note.) It is troubling that the number of these murders is holding steady, rather than decreasing in light of increased public awareness. There were a total of eighteen reported honor crimes in 2008, with the number ranging from 15 to 25 killings per year over the past decade.

[1](#)4. (SBU) Jordanians as a whole, even the most ardent critics of honor crimes, believe that the problem is likely much worse in other countries in the region but that the media's freedom to cover each murder and public awareness campaigns mean that the spotlight is often on Jordan. However, activists contend, "Each and every murder should be publicized. Jordan should not be excused."

Post Efforts to Combat Honor Crimes

15. (SBU) Post has actively engaged a wide range of government and societal leaders on the need to prevent and appropriately punish honor crimes. The Ambassador has personally raised each new honor crime and every lenient sentence with the Chief of the Royal Court and has repeatedly raised the need for action with the Minister of Justice, Prime Minister, and Foreign Minister. Additionally, post has:

- Reached out to all levels of government to promote Penal Code amendments strengthening judicial sentencing guidelines. Though an amendment was introduced to Parliament to increase the minimum sentence for honor crimes to at least three years, tribal representatives and other conservatives continue to block the measure.

- Engaged the Ministry of Justice and the judiciary on ways to ensure appropriate sentencing, including discouraging judges from a reduction of sentences when the victim's family drops charges. This is key as many victims and perpetrators are from the same family.

- Planned training of criminal court and appellate judges on the legalities involved in honor crime cases.

- Successfully encouraged the establishment of a criminal court tribunal to rule on honor crime-related cases in order to unify verdicts and ensure that perpetrators are convicted in accordance with the gravity of their crimes.

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- Sponsored discussions on honor crimes with award winning writer and activist Rana Husseini, who recently released a book "Murder in the Name of Honor." Post nominated Husseini for a VOLVIS program in order for her to share experiences with activists in the U.S.

- Supported the work of NGO activists, including university students who initiated an "awareness caravan" in conservative communities. Post has also encouraged journalists to continue coverage of the issue and for societal and religious leaders to speak out, as well.

- Organized a meeting for the Ambassador and leading activists to map out next steps to combat honor crimes, especially at the community level.

16. (SBU) Post efforts appear to be taking a foothold and some positive developments include:

- Fifteen-year initial sentences in the last five cases, although sentences were reduced to 7.5 years when families dropped charges. These sentences are an improvement over prior verdicts as the judges refrained from awarding six-month sentences based on the "fits of fury" defense.

- Increased coverage in local Arab-language media outlets and recent statements by a few religious leaders condemning honor crimes.

- Public announcement that the GOJ formed a special tribunal to try honor crimes that will begin work after a summer judicial break.

Government, Parliament, Societal Viewpoints

17. (SBU) Viewpoints on honor crimes and family honor vary widely. Without national unity, true reform and a change of public perception will be slow. Below is a snapshot of viewpoints from various groups:

--Royal Family: They have spoken out against honor crimes, though they currently prefer to work behind the scenes for reform. This is likely a result of a 2003 effort, led by the Queen and other members of the royal family, which failed to get any legislative amendments through parliament and prompted a backlash from conservative elements of society. The royal family is now pressuring the government officials, especially the judiciary, to take active steps to combat honor crimes.

--Government: While key figures, such as the Prime Minister, previous and current Foreign Ministers, and Justice Minister, appear to support reform, the cabinet is not fully unified or motivated to move this agenda item forward as a top priority.

--Parliament: Tribally-conservative Members of Parliament (MPs), who dominate parliament, are fearful of a backlash from constituents and continue to oppose any legislation related to honor crimes, including tougher sentencing. Other MPs also oppose legislation on family or tribal issues, which is viewed as the jurisdiction tribal leaders.

--Tribal leaders: They reject the use of legislation or increased penalties, believing honor crimes can best be prevented by tribal leaders who are engaged with their communities and respond to problems at the local level.

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